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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 002962

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, NSC FOR BADER

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TAGS: PREL PGOV TH

SUBJECT: THAILAND: AMBASSADOR AND FM KASIT DISCUSS U.S.
ASIA DIPLOMACY, CAMBODIA, THAKSIN

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Thai Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya called Ambassador to the Foreign Ministry on short notice late November 19, primarily to discuss Cambodia and Thaksin. Kasit began the meeting expressing "profound thanks" for the President and Secretary's effective re-engagement in Asia this year. Kasit blamed the ongoing diplomatic spat between Thailand and Cambodia as the by-product of former PM Thaksin Shinawatra's desire to bring down the RTG at any cost. Kasit described Indonesian efforts to act as a broker for Thai-Cambodian messages; he appealed to the U.S. to "put a few words" in with Hun Sen about disengaging from Thaksin's machinations against a fellow ASEAN neighbor. Ambassador suggested that Thailand should seek to take the high road going forward, finding ways it could publicly cooperate with Cambodia, easing tensions. As the meeting broke up, FM Kasit mentioned the Lao Hmong issue, underscoring the Thai commitment to working closely with Laos while being mindful of the concerns of the international community.

¶2. (C) Comment: In a session that had the air of musing out loud, Kasit was not as focused in this meeting, in terms of agenda and message, as he usually is, a sign perhaps that Thai officials are unsure of next steps in the Thai-Cambodia dynamic and what Thaksin's next steps may be, with the next red rally anticipated to be larger and longer than any since the April red riots. We will follow-up with ideas on health-related and other humanitarian projects that have a U.S. component that might serve as vehicles for useful cross-border humanitarian gestures. End Summary.

"Profound thanks" for U.S. return to Asia

¶3. (C) Clearly buoyed by APEC and ASEAN-related discussions in Singapore, FM Kasit began the early evening meeting with Ambassador and PolCouns by expressing "profound thanks" for the reinvigorated U.S. engagement in Asia in 2009, culminating with President Obama's recent Asia swing but including Secretary Clinton's two prior trips to Asia. This reaffirmation of U.S. interest in Asia by both physical presence of the President and Secretary, and substantive dialogue and proposed cooperation, such as the Lower Mekong Initiative launched by the Secretary in Phuket at the July

ASEAN Regional Forum, was critically important, Kasit stressed.

¶ 14. (C) FM Kasit referenced useful "chit chat" on the margins of APEC between Thai PM Abhisit and the President, as well as with Secretary Clinton prior to the President's arrival. PM Abhisit and the Royal Thai Government (RTG) were deeply appreciative of the President's interest in what was going on domestically in Thailand, and especially of the health of His Majesty King Bhumibol, Kasit added.

Thaksin's challenge to the "very fabric" of Thai society

¶ 15. (C) Switching to the domestic political situation, Kasit asserted that the current RTG was committed to promoting the further democratization of Thai society and ensuring that authorities played by the rule of law. The coalition government looked to stay in office long enough to show results from their education reform and infrastructure development policies. National reconciliation, regardless of political color, was essential if the country were to move forward. However, Kasit felt compelled to clarify the situation vis-a-vis Thaksin, due to suggestions from (unspecified) American quarters. It is too late to expect the RTG to negotiate a deal with Thaksin, he stated. Two factors, the two year sentence for abuse of office/corruption, and his instigation of violence in April aiming to topple the RTG, made negotiations or "out of court" settlements impossible.

¶ 16. (C) Ambassador asked Kasit why Thaksin had taken two controversial steps in recent weeks that seemingly undercut his position in Thailand--the Cambodia trip and the Times

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Online interview touching on the monarchy. Thaksin had knowingly gone down a path over the past five-six years, rejecting any possibility of compromise, that had led him and the country to the current situation, Kasit stated.

¶ 17. (C) For his part, Thaksin continued to pursue extra-constitutional methods to force a change in government, and his "rhetorical mud-slinging" on the issue of the monarchy, claimed Kasit. In so doing, Thaksin was trying to undermine the very fabric of Thai society, and the stability of the country, with violence the only way to achieve his objectives. Kasit warned this process, if it spun out of control, had the potential to affect U.S.-Thai relations as well. Ambassador underscored the Embassy's consistent message to red-shirt leaders of the United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), Puea Thai politicians, and others associated with Thaksin that they should not employ violence in pursuit of their political aims. Kasit responded that all Thais should work out of a common believe in the democratic system, but that Thaksin was working to undermine the fabric of Thailand's democratic regime.

International voices to Hun Sen (on the Thaksin issue)

¶ 18. (C) FM Kasit said Thailand would "highly appreciate" the U.S. sharing "a few words" with Cambodian leader Hun Sen "to help him come to his senses" regarding his support of Thaksin, in light of what the red-shirts "intend to do next week" (note: a reference to the red-shirt announcement of a rally starting November 28 that they vow will continue until it topples the RTG. End note). Hun Sen was supporting a force publicly intent on destabilizing Thailand; Thailand would appreciate messages to Hun Sen to disassociate with Thaksin. Apart from the Thaksin factor, the rest of the Thai-Cambodia relationship could be quickly put back on an even keel, Kasit opined, adding that the Thai continued to talk to Hun Sen's West Point-educated son, "whom we find sensible, though we do not know what he says to his father."

¶ 9. (C) Kasit described one international mediating effort ongoing; on the margins of the Singapore APEC/ASEAN meetings, Indonesian President SBY had invited PM Abhisit/FM Kasit to meet him and Indonesian FM Marie, and subsequently met Hun Sen, to hear both countries' views on how the diplomatic spat had evolved. SBY had delegated FM Marie to serve as an interlocutor to pass messages between the Thai and Cambodians. According to Kasit, the Thai message via the Indonesians to Hun Sen had been simple: disassociate with Thaksin, and help the relationship revert to where it was prior to October 23, when Hun Sen arrived in Thailand for the ASEAN Summit and publicly insulted the Thai judicial and political processes in unacceptable terms.

¶ 10. (C) Hun Sen's further comments in media interviews alleging that the Democrat Party was orchestrating anti-Cambodia press coverage and PAD activities was off-base, Kasit asserted; the Thai had repeatedly explained to Hun Sen that Thailand was an open society with a free media, and that the yellow-shirts spent more time attacking the Democrat-led coalition than they did focused on Cambodia/Hun Sen.

¶ 11. (C) When asked about Thai assessments of Hun Sen's motivation in making such public common cause with Thaksin, Kasit replied that Hun Sen appeared frustrated that he was not able to realize short-term financial gain from an expected package deal with Thaksin and allies over territory around Preah Vihear to be turned into a "Disney-like" entertainment complex, as well as the joint off-shore development area. Out of frustration, Hun Sen appeared to have bet on pressuring the current Thai government to fall, banking on Thaksin-backed forces to win the next election, amend the Constitution, pardon Thaksin, implement one-party rule, and deliver him payback in return.

Next Steps in Thai-Cambodia relations

¶ 12. (C) Kasit painted a bleak picture of the immediate next

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developments in the Thai-Cambodia spat. Hun Sen would run a "kangaroo court" on the arrested Thai national, and he had effectively nationalized the Thai company with a 33 year concession to run the Air Traffic Control service by ejecting the Thai management. Kasit suggested Hun Sen's motives were to undermine Thai public support of the RTG's position by playing the personal tragedy and business dispute cards. Already the owner of the air traffic control concession was begging the RTG to salvage his investment; meanwhile, the MFA was paying out \$20,000 in legal services for his arrested employee, and paying to fly his mother to Cambodia to see him.

¶ 13. (C) Ambassador suggested Thailand should take the high road going forward, given that Hun Sen had precipitated the crisis by so publicly hosting Thaksin, by finding ways it could publicly cooperate with Cambodia, both to ease tensions and to underscore to international partners and friends its positive approach to the situation. Kasit replied that he had written to ASEAN Foreign Ministers and engaged them personally. Indonesia and Malaysia were "with us," Kasit assessed, Singapore cautious. Vietnam would not allow Thaksin to visit; even Brunei was "okay." It came down to just Cambodia and Hun Sen.

¶ 14. (C) Ambassador suggested other avenues of cooperation, including promoting humanitarian assistance in areas such as health cooperation in fighting malaria affecting the Thai-Cambodia border area and distribution of H1N1 vaccines via the WHO. Kasit replied positively, noting that Thailand was continuing all humanitarian and development assistance projects for Cambodia, that Thailand continued to buy tapioca and corn from Cambodia contract farmers, and that border commanders continued their regular lunches and discussion of cooperative border efforts; anti-malarial efforts were important in this regard. Thailand had no issue with the

Cambodian people, Kasit stressed; Thailand had attended the recent Japan-Mekong Summit as a co-donor with Japan, not as an aid recipient.

Lao Hmong

¶115. (C) As the meeting started to break up, Kasit asked if there were new developments regarding the issue of the Lao Hmong. Ambassador referenced the recent meeting between PRM and the Thai Embassy in Washington. Nodding, Kasit replied that he had read the embassy's report. Thailand continued to talk to the Lao regarding repatriations, but at the same time it was mindful of the international community's concerns and interest in the issue, he concluded.

JOHN